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SUBJECT: TALAT ON CYPRUS NEGOTIATIONS: GLASS IS HALF-FULL

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat portrayed the status of ongoing Cyprus negotiations in realistic yet optimistic terms in a November 20 speech in Ankara. Talat was clear in pointing out the trouble spots where negotiations have to date accomplished little, and agreed with comments made by several observers that additional international pressure on the Greek Cypriots would be necessary to push the pace of talks forward more quickly. However, perhaps recognizing the pessimistic outlook toward the talks shared by many Cyprus watchers in Turkey, Talat noted progress had been made and pushed back on those who argued that only international community threats to recognize an independent "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" would work in forcing Christofias and the Greek Cypriots to get serious about negotiations. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) Talat spoke before a small invited audience of diplomats, journalists, and think-tankers November 20 at the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) in Ankara. The talk, billed as a roundtable discussion on "Cyprus Negotiations: Where Do We Stand?", and follow-on question and answer session was in English, but Talat made prefatory remarks in Turkish, primarily aimed at a small gaggle of Turkish television cameras allowed in for the opening few minutes. In those remarks, Talat noted that talks are ongoing, that there has been some progress, that much work remains to be done, and that ultimate success is possible if there is flexibility on both sides. He also took the occasion to criticize an MOU signed recently by the ROC and Russia in which both promised to enhance bilateral relations, saying that such "unilateral agreements will not help the negotiations process."

¶3. (SBU) Once the cameras had been removed from the room, Talat provided a brief synopsis of what it had taken to get comprehensive settlement negotiations re-started. He claimed that the international community's stance toward Kosovo's independence and a February statement made by then Russian President Vladimir Putin, accusing the West of a double-standard in pressing for Kosovar independence but not insisting on an independent Turkish Cypriot state, had been helpful in getting the Greek Cypriot public to question the anti-settlement approach of former President Tassos Papadopoulos and had helped to bring about the surprise election of Demetris Christofias.

¶4. (SBU) Talat lamented that despite lengthy pre-election talks between Christofias' AKEL party and T/C counterparts on the Annan Plan and how comprehensive settlement negotiations could move forward quickly were he to be elected, the new ROC President had backtracked following his election and refused to accept Annan as the starting point for a new round of negotiations. Talat attributed this to Papadopoulos' demonization of Annan. However, the practical effect for the current round of talks had been that while the G/C side insists it is not bound by Annan and believes itself free to offer up new ideas on a host of issues on which agreement had

been reached in the Annan Plan, the Greek Cypriots nonetheless act as if the Turkish Cypriots are indeed bound by Annan and accuse the T/C side of backtracking or taking a hard-line approach if Talat puts forward new proposals himself. As Talat described it, both sides refer to Annan at times, when it suits their positions, but talks are also covering ground outside the parameters of Annan.

¶ 15. (SBU) Talat also provided an overview of the substance of the talks, noting the parties had engaged in discussions on power-sharing and governance and had reached some "semi-agreements." He said there had been agreement on the "main subject" but some aspects remain on the table. He said the discussion on competencies was over for now, adding that there remain "big differences over executive powers." Acknowledging problems remain in reaching agreement on the workings of the federal legislature and the GC/TC numerical division, Talat nonetheless characterized the differences with regard to the legislature as being "not big." He also claimed the two sides were close to agreement with regard to the judiciary. In short, Talat said there really has been progress, but from his standpoint the pace of progress remains unsatisfactory.

¶ 16. (SBU) The Greek Cypriots continue to refuse to accept the implementation of any formal timetable for negotiations, without which it will be nearly impossible to move talks forward sufficiently to maintain momentum. Talat expressed hope that the international community, and the UNSYG's Special Advisor, understand the need to bring greater pressure in order to achieve progress, but had been discouraged by actions in recent months which he claimed had had just the opposite effect. He specifically pointed to the

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June 2008 UNSCR that accepted the UNSYG's report in which language was changed with regard to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, and to bilateral MOUs signed by both Russia and the UK with the ROC, as examples of actions that lead Greek Cypriots to conclude there is no penalty for maintaining the status quo. Subsequent ROC actions that contribute to or worsen the isolation of the Turkish Cypriots, including ROC insistence on preventing foreign leaders from meeting with Talat in his office in the north, only serve to further undermine the negotiating atmosphere. He said it seems clear the Greek Cypriots feel no compulsion to move quickly and, in fact, likely would prefer to see negotiations drag on to the end of 2009, under the misconception that Turkey's EU accession process and its commitments under the Ankara Protocol to open ports to Cypriot vessels will force the Turkish side to make concessions. In the meantime, Turkish Cypriots are in a hurry because every day "we lose a little more ground economically." Talat said he believes the international community will "begin to intervene at some point," noting there is no guarantee of that but there have been "some indications."

¶ 17. (SBU) Responding to questions regarding the possibility that international recognition of Kosovo and Russian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia might provide the Turkish Cypriots greater leverage, Talat made clear he did not cite Kosovo as an example for the Cyprus situation. He had noted it merely as having served as a "fearful reminder" to the Greek Cypriots that independence for the north could occur. He emphasized that he has "no other ideas beyond a negotiated settlement" in resolving Cyprus' long-standing division.

¶ 18. (SBU) COMMENT: While expressing frustration at the pace of the talks, Talat was decidedly more optimistic about the ultimate success of the negotiations than his Turkish audience.

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